

TANF

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES

What is TANF?

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193) replaced the AFDC and JOBS Programs with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) which includes the TANF Work Program.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, administered by the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS), provides benefits for families with needy children under age 18 without regard to race, creed, or national origin. Monthly TANF benefits are paid for children and their needy caretaker relatives who do not have enough income or resources to meet their everyday needs by state standards.

How long may a person receive TANF?

Beginning in October 1996, no family that includes an adult can receive TANF assistance for more than 60 months. During the 60-month time period, the non-exempt parents or needy caretaker in the family must work or participate in an approved work activity as soon as that person is determined ready to work. No benefits will be paid to the family if the person is not participating in an approved work activity after being determined work ready, or no longer than 24 months of benefits, whichever comes first.

Where to apply?

The parent(s) or relative should apply for TANF at the county Department of Human Services(DHS) Economic Assistance office which is open Monday through Friday. If a person is not able to go to the office, other arrangements may be made.

How is eligibility determined for a TANF family?

When an application for assistance is made, a worker will conduct an interview and collect information to see whether the family is eligible according to all of the TANF regulations. Then the person will receive a notice in the mail within 30 days stating whether the family is approved for benefits. Some factors involved in determining whether the family will receive TANF are:

Deprivation - The children for whom TANF benefits are requested must be deprived of parental care and support of at least one parent by reason of absence, disability or unemployment. If the parent or parents are absent, the reason for the absence must be determined. This absence may be due to situations such as death, non-marriage, desertion, divorce, illness or hospitalization and in some cases unemployment of one or both parents.

Social Security Numbers (SSN) - Each person for whom TANF is requested must apply for and/or provide their Social Security number.

Citizenship Status - Each person for whom TANF assistance is requested must be a citizen of the United States or a qualified alien.

Income - The TANF family's income, and the income of a stepparent with whom the child lives must be considered in determining whether the basic needs of the child are being met.

Resources - In order to be eligible, the case members must not own property (other than the home) or have cash or other resources which have a combined value of over \$2000.

Disability - If the application is made because a parent is ill or disabled, the disabled parent will be required to have an examination by a licensed physician and the medical report reviewed by doctors and personnel in the State Office to see whether the person meets the definition of disability. However, if the parent receives SSI or Social Security or 100% VA benefits based on disability, the examination and review are not necessary.

Unemployed parent - A family with both able-bodied legal parents in the home may be eligible for the Unemployed Parent (TANF-UP) program if the principal wage earner meets certain conditions regarding past and present employment and other requirements of TANF are met.

Child support - All applicants for and recipients of TANF must assign their rights to support to the State and cooperate with the State in establishing paternity and obtaining support. Failure without good cause to assign those rights to the State or failure to cooperate with the State in establishing paternity and obtaining child support will cause the application for TANF assistance to be denied, or the TANF benefit for the family to be closed.

If the TANF case is closed because of a failure without a good cause to cooperate with the Division of Child Support Enforcement requirements, the family will not be approved for TANF again until that child support requirement has been met or the family becomes exempt.

TANF Work Program - This program assists TANF clients to become self-sufficient by providing needed employment-related activities and support services. Participation in this program is a requirement for persons who receive TANF and are not exempt for certain reasons. If these persons refuse to take part in the program, the TANF case will be closed or denied. Persons who are exempt from TANF work participation may volunteer to participate. A person may get more information about how the TANF work program works at any county Economic Assistance office.

Family benefit cap - The TANF benefit will be limited only to children existing or conceived at the time the caretaker relative initially applies and qualifies for assistance. Only children born into the family during the first 10 months the family receives benefits may be added to the case unless the child meets one of the exception reasons. The family benefit cap date is set for the first benefit month and the 10-month count begins with that month. Children born to minor parents who are themselves receiving TANF benefits as a dependent child will not increase the family benefit unless the infant is born within the first 10 months the family receives assistance.

A child born into the family after the family has been off TANF assistance for at least 12 consecutive months may be added if the family applies again and is approved for benefits. No additional children may be added after 10 months in the new benefit period, and no child previously subject to the family benefit cap will be added in any future benefit period for that family.

Strikers - Persons in a TANF budget group who are on strike because of a labor dispute are not eligible unless they were eligible the day before the strike and continue to be eligible at the time of application.

School attendance - All children ages 6 through 17 years must attend school regularly unless there is good cause. Failure to meet this requirement for children ages 6 through 12 years will mean a 25% reduction in the family's TANF and SNAP benefits. Failure to meet this requirement for children ages 13 through 17 years will mean TANF disqualification for the child and a 25% reduction in the SNAP benefit.

Immunization - All children included in the TANF case must receive timely immunizations as recommended by the State Department of Health. Failure to meet this requirement without good cause will mean a 25% reduction in the TANF and the SNAP benefits.

THE PARENT(S) OR RELATIVE WHO APPLIES FOR TANF MUST:

- sign a Personal Responsibility Contract
- participate in the TANF Work Program unless qualified for exemption
- apply for and/or provide social security account numbers for all family members
- assign support rights to the State of Mississippi on behalf of all family members and cooperate in establishing paternity and obtaining support
- attest to the citizenship status of the adults and the children
- provide verification of their relationship to the child(ren), dates of birth of all for whom assistance is requested, income and resources

How much will the TANF benefit be?

The amount of the TANF benefit is based on the family's size and income. When the income does not meet the needs, the family may be approved for TANF for part of the unmet need up to the State maximums. Monthly TANF benefits in Mississippi are limited to:

- \$110 for the first person
- \$36 for the second person
- \$24 for each additional person

Families who qualify for a benefit of less than \$10.00 do not receive a payment.

What are the reporting requirements?

TANF households must report changes based on individual household requirements.

An exception to this rule requires that a parent or caretaker relative must report **within 5 days** if they move out of state and when a child who receives TANF benefits leaves the home and it becomes clear to the family that the child will be gone for **more than 30 days**. Failure to report this change will cause the parent or caretaker relative to be disqualified from TANF. Failure to report this change timely can also mean a 25% penalty reduction in the household's SNAP benefit.

What happens when a person's TANF case is closed?

If the TANF case closes because of increased earnings or loss of disregards the family may qualify for help in paying for child care and transportation when the case closes.

If the TANF case closes because of a work program violation, the penalty time period must be served and the person who caused the violation must comply with the work requirement or meet an exemption before a TANF application can be approved again.

If a person disagrees with the Department's decision, what are the options?

A person may ask for a hearing anytime they disagree with actions taken by the county Economic Assistance Office affecting the TANF case. Each notice concerning actions being taken on the TANF case will explain how to request a hearing. The individual will be given an opportunity to present facts, speak for himself, and bring anyone to the hearing to help him present his case. The person may request the hearing with the county office or the State Office to hear the evidence and review the case.

Any person who applies for or receives assistance or services also has the right to file a complaint with the county Economic Assistance Office, the State Office, or with the federal government if it appears discrimination is being practiced.

What is the penalty for the fraudulent receipt of the TANF benefits?

Anyone who makes or causes to be made a false statement or misrepresentation of material in an application or for use in determining eligibility for TANF may be referred to law enforcement for prosecution. If found guilty it could result in fines, imprisonment or both. The Department will also take all reasonable and practical steps to correct and collect all improper payments made through the TANF program. Using guidelines dictated by federal regulations and state law, the Department will also recover from the person who caused the overpayment even though that individual may no longer receive TANF benefits.

MDHS will consider each application without regard to race, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, national origin or political beliefs and marital or family status.

NOTES

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